



# Trail News

January 21, 2016

From the

## Meeteetse Conservation District

P.O. Box 237 • 1906 State Street • Meeteetse, WY 82433  
307-868-2484 • Fax 307-868-2489 • [mcd@tctwest.net](mailto:mcd@tctwest.net) • [www.meeteetsecd-wy.gov](http://www.meeteetsecd-wy.gov)

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BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Wildlife officials have divvied up how many grizzly bears can be killed by hunters in the Yellowstone region of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho as the states seek control of a species shielded from hunting for the past 40 years, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

The region's grizzlies have federal protections, but that could change in coming months, turning control over to the states. The AP obtained a draft agreement detailing the states' plans for the animals.

The deal puts no limits on grizzly bear hunting outside a 19,300-square-mile management zone centered on Yellowstone National Park. Inside the zone, which includes wilderness and forest lands near the park, hunters in Wyoming would get a 58 percent share of the harvest, a reflection that it's home to the bulk of the region's bears. Montana would get 34 percent, and Idaho, 8 percent. The management zone has an estimated minimum 717 grizzly bears.

There is no estimate of how many live outside the area, although the number is increasing as they expand into new habitat, biologists say. Wildlife advocates say the bear population remains too small to withstand much hunting. That's a particular concern

given the large numbers of bears already dying, including during surprise run-ins with hunters and after livestock attacks that prompt officials to trap and kill problem bears. In 2015, at least 59 Yellowstone-area grizzlies were believed to have been killed or trapped and removed by government agencies. That's the most since the animal received protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1975.

Despite the deaths, state officials say the grizzly population has recovered from excessive hunting and trapping that exterminated grizzlies across most of the U.S. in the early 1900s. The officials have increased pressure on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director Dan Ashe in recent months to revoke the animal's threatened status.

Directors of the three states' wildlife agencies told Ashe in a Dec. 4 letter that such a step was long overdue. "It is critically important that we capitalize on our tremendous progress and momentum ... by proceeding with a long overdue delisting" of bears from the threatened species list, the directors wrote. It was signed by Idaho Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Director Jeff Hagener; and Wyoming Game and Fish Director Scott Talbott.

Legal hunting of Yellowstone-area grizzlies last occurred in the 1970s. At least 58 bears were killed in Montana and Idaho in the five years leading up to a prohibition on hunting in 1975. Historical harvest figures for Idaho were not available.

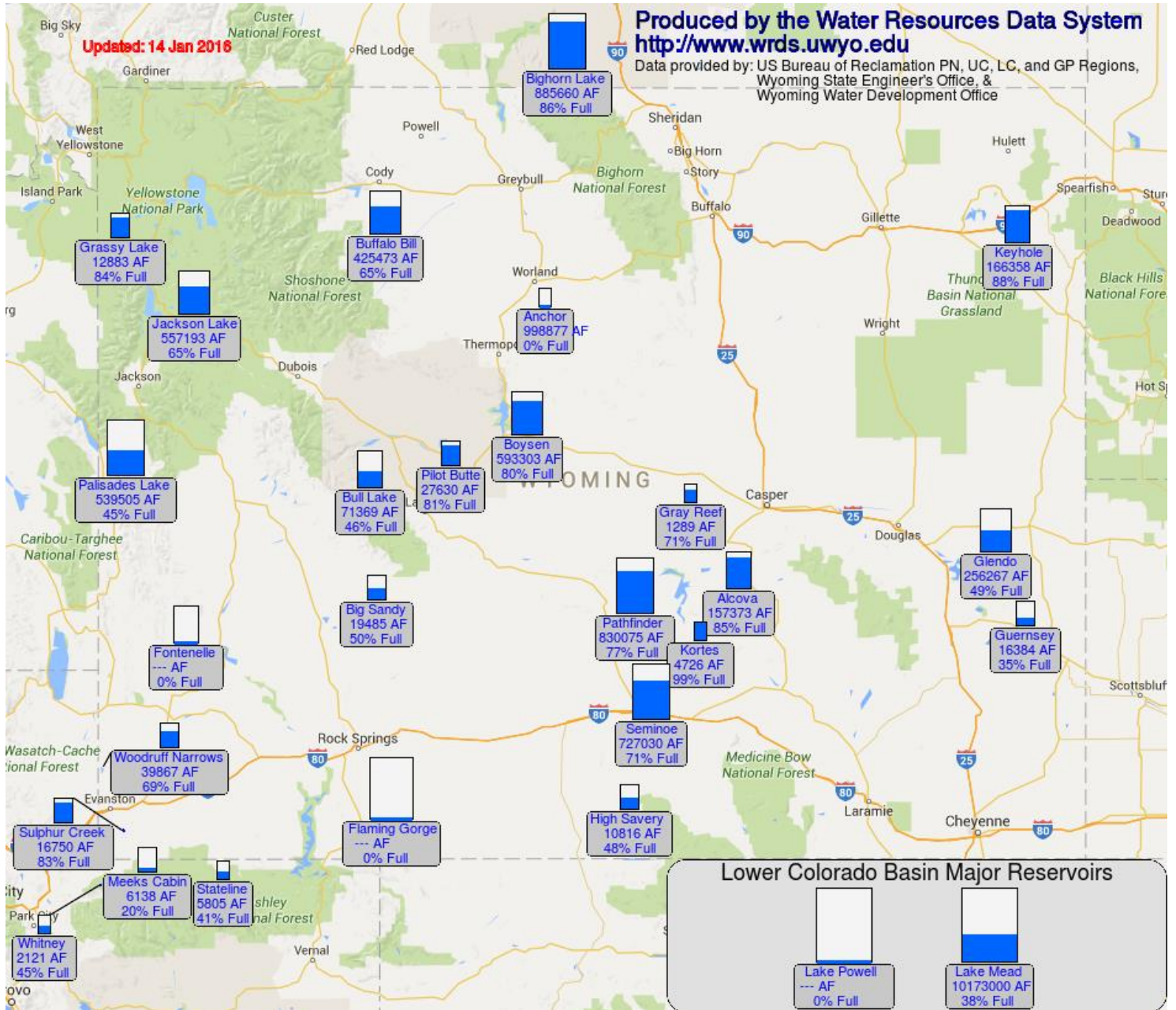
Any future hunts would be conservative and need approval from wildlife commissioners following a public comment period, said Quentin Kujala, chief of wildlife management for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

The size of each harvest would be on a sliding scale, with the intention of keeping the bear population viable and avoiding the need to reinstate federal protections, Kujala said. More hunting would be possible when the population tops 675 bears, and hunting would be largely barred if the number falls below 600. "We're definitely not talking about a large number. We're not talking hundreds or anywhere near that," Wyoming Game and Fish spokesman Renny MacKay said.

A decision on whether protections should be lifted is due early this year, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Barring a successful court challenge, it would take approximately a year for such a rule to go into effect. The pending agreement between the states is not required for federal protections to be lifted, state officials said.

**Report #11****Monday Morning Snow Report****Jan. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Good morning everyone. This is the 11<sup>th</sup> Monday Snow Report for the 2015-2016 snow season. Last year at this time the state median was 100% with a low of 78% and a high of 131%. This year the state median is 80% with a low of 50% and a high of 105% of median. See the table & map below for more information. The map may differ slightly from the table depending upon how many stations were reporting at the time or date. For those of you with INTERNET capability, this report and map showing SWE percentages for the state can be found at [www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/nrcs/nrcs.html](http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/nrcs/nrcs.html). For the median, go to [www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/normals/median\\_average.htm](http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/normals/median_average.htm).

**-----Reminders and Updates-----**

**February 8<sup>th</sup> ~ 3:00p.m. – MCD Regular Board Meeting, 1906 State Street, Meeteetse.**  
 The public is welcome.

**Happy Trails to You! Bernie, Ginny, Nolan & Steffen**